

[IMAGE]

## Tackling the Growing Problem of Childhood Obesity: 5 Strategies

By Editorial Staff

Sept. 1 kicked off the fifth annual National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, but your role in helping your children – and the children of everyone you know – avoid the perils of obesity should be a year-round responsibility you embrace. After all, what child deserves to suffer the embarrassment, health risks and other negative consequences of obesity? Here are some easy ways to help your children avoid obesity while learning healthy lifestyle habits they can pass on to *their* children someday:

*1. Snack sensibly:* What snacks do your children have access to throughout their average day? Fighting obesity starts with sound nutrition. If your pantry contains a glut of processed, packaged, empty-calorie foods (most things that come in a box or bag these days), your kids are starting down a dangerous road when it comes to weight - and their health. Balance out their snack options – at home and school – by turning your kids away from the pantry and toward a refrigerator stocked with fresh fruit, crisp vegetables and lean sources of protein that will help build lean muscle, not fat.

*2. Avoid the couch:* Long gone are the days of sending your kids outside to play for hours. Today's technology-driven lifestyle means children (not to mention adults) end up glued to the couch for hour after hour, flipping through their 500-channel cable package, playing video games, scrolling through text messages or surfing the web. It's a double-edged sword when it comes to obesity: not only are they sedentary, but they're also more likely to grab some of those poor snack choices from the pantry while they brain-fade.

childhood obesity - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark *3. Schedule exercise:* While participation in organized sports is at an all-time high, too many children don't exercise unless they have to practice for their team sport. What can you do to encourage daily exercise? Schedule it – just like you do with the rest of your kids' day. When you're figuring out their homework schedule, chore schedule, reading schedule and piano practice schedule, work in 30 minutes to an hour a day of exercise. We know you're busy, but trust us, it's worth it. And keep in mind that you don't need to schedule exercise in one block; in fact, breaking it up

into 10-15-minute segments is a good way to give your kids a fun break from all their other responsibilities.

4. *Dine at home:* A recent study suggests people who eat out (fast-food or sit-down restaurant fare) consume approximately 200 calories more than people who eat their meals at home. When it comes to obesity, that's reason enough to drive right through the drive-through and make your way home for a healthy family meal. Don't think you have the time? Preparation goes a long way. An hour on Sunday afternoon prepping rice, vegetables and chicken will make your weeknight meals a whole lot easier to prepare – and enjoy. And remember, evidence also suggests that eating together at the dinner table leads to healthier lifestyle choices. So eat in more and reap the health benefits.

5. *Sleep soundly:* Sleep is the often-overlooked key to a healthy lifestyle, and when it comes to obesity, research suggests inadequate / poor sleep and obesity are definitely associated. How? It's a simple premise: Lack of sleep (or poor sleep that leaves you unrefreshed), particularly over the course of weeks or months, disrupts your entire routine. After all, who wants to exercise or eat right when you barely have the energy to keep your eyes open? What's more, the resulting stress from poor sleep may elevate obesity risk because cortisol, the "stress hormone," affects fat storage and weight gain. It's a vicious cycle – too little sleep leads to stress; too much stress leads to weight gain; weight gain leads to more stress and less sleep; and so on.

Childhood obesity is a big issue, but you can do something about it – starting today. Teach your children healthy lifestyle habits that help them maintain a healthy weight. Your first, most important step in that process: make sure *you're* modeling healthy habits they can emulate. To learn more about National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, [click here](#).

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